

**Before the
Federal Communications Commission
Washington, D.C. 20554**

In the Matter of)	
)	
Advanced Methods to Target and Eliminate)	CG Docket No. 17-59
Unlawful Robocalls)	

Comments of AARP

July 3, 2017

Trevor R. Roycroft, Ph.D.
Economic Consultant

David Certner
Legislative Counsel and
Legislative Policy Director
Government Affairs
AARP
601 E Street, NW
Washington, DC 20049

Introduction

AARP respectfully submits these Comments for the FCC’s consideration, and thanks the Commission for the opportunity to participate in this important proceeding regarding the blocking of unlawful robocalls. AARP believes that the NPRM is a step in the right direction—relief from unwanted robocalls is a concern to older Americans, who are frequently targeted by scam artists and fraudsters.

Comments

AARP has a few concerns regarding the implementation of the Draft Proposed Rules. As is noted in the NPRM, because of the sophisticated spoofing techniques utilized today by fraudulent robocallers, for robocalls to be stopped, numbers must be blocked.¹ As specified in the Draft Proposed Rules, the blocking may be associated with requests from the subscriber, based on the “originating number shown in the Caller ID without regard to whether the calls in fact originate from that number.” In addition, *service providers* may block calls originating from numbers that are not valid North American Numbering Plan (NANP) numbers; from a valid NANP number that is not allocated by the NANP Administrator or Pooling Administrator; and valid NANP number that have been allocated by the NANP administrator or Pooling Administrator, but which are not assigned to a subscriber.² Thus, under the proposed rules, some potential blocking may be initiated by the entity that directly controls a number, and other blocking may be initiated by a service provider.

¹¹ Draft Proposed Rules, amendments to § 64.1200

² *Id.*

Protection for consumers from “false positives” is needed

As the NPRM recognizes, call blocking is serious business: “call blocking poses a threat to the ubiquity and seamlessness of the network, the Commission has long had a strong policy against allowing voice service providers to block calls.”³ AARP believes that the Commission must take proactive measures for consumers who may be inadvertently affected by a block. In addition to the possibility of having their own number blocked inadvertently, consumers also run the risk of losing the opportunity to receive valuable and requested information from other legitimate numbers that may have been inadvertently blocked. For example, AARP provides teletownhall services that are fully compliant with all current laws and rules to serve members who request information about a variety of topics, including fraud detection and prevention. When discussing the ability of consumers to apply existing blocking solutions, the final Robocall Strike Force Report notes that, “solutions will always have some level of false positives.”⁴ However, the proposed rules have the potential to expand the scope of false positives, as blocking will not always be in the hands of consumers, but will instead be in the hands of service providers. As the rules enable the blocking of valid NANP numbers that have been allocated by the NANP Administrator or Pooling Administrator, the universe of numbers that can be systematically blocked has the potential to include numbers that may have been assigned to consumers. Of course, these numbers are managed by service providers, and hopefully the potential for the “false positive” blocking of active consumer numbers by a service provider is small. However, as the old proverb states, “There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip.” AARP does not believe that the potential for blocking of innocent consumer numbers cannot be ruled out.

³ NPRM, ¶9.

⁴ Robocall Strike Force Report, October 26, 2016, p. 16.

As is noted in the Notice of Inquiry, the rights of legitimate callers are a concern.

“[W]e seek comment on implementing a process to allow legitimate callers to notify providers when their calls are blocked and to require providers immediately to cease blocking calls when they learn that the calls are legitimate.”⁵

AARP believes that this is an appropriate policy, however, given that this appears in the NOI, no rule on this matter will be forthcoming in the near term. As a result, until those notification procedures are established, consumers may be at risk for inappropriate blocking of their ability to make calls. It would seem to be prudent to have the needed procedures to allow consumers to quickly counteract inadvertent blocking in place *prior* to the commencement of the general robocall blocking program. The implementation of this vital consumer protection would provide assurances to consumers that they would not be trapped in a “Catch-22” situation where their calls are blocked, and they have no obvious path to restore the ability to place calls.

All technology platforms should provide high-quality blocking of illegal robocalls

While the NPRM mentions the potential to block calls is present for legacy TDM technology, for VoIP, and for wireless mobility, it makes no mention of assurances that the performance of blocking technology across these platforms will be equal and of high quality. AARP is concerned that legacy platforms should enjoy the same potential for the blocking of illegal robocalls as VoIP and wireless platforms. AARP observes that the largest legacy wireline providers do not support existing solutions such as “Nomorobo.”⁶

⁵ *Id.* ¶39.

⁶ The screenshots that follow are from <https://www.nomorobo.com/signup>

Nomorobo

Unfortunately, Verizon (Traditional Landline) does not support Nomorobo yet.

Figure 1: Verizon landline does not support Nomorobo.

Nomorobo

Unfortunately, AT&T (Traditional Landline) does not support Nomorobo yet.

Figure 2: AT&T landline does not support Nomorobo

While these major carriers do not support Nomorobo, Frontier Communications does:

Nomorobo

Good News! Frontier supports Nomorobo!

Figure 3: Frontier landline supports Nomorobo

AARP is concerned that the persistence of robocalls will reduce the value of basic telephone service to a customer. Thus, the FCC should ensure that all platforms—TDM, VoIP, and wireless—have the same high-quality blocking performance. The persistence of robocalls should not be allowed to degrade legacy TDM-based systems.

Call blocking systems should be hardened against cyberattacks

Finally, AARP encourages the Commission to encourage state-of-the-art security for the systems that will enable the blocking of calls. With the potential for call blocking, another set of nefarious actors—black hat hackers—will gain a new potential target. The computer systems that will enable blocking of illegal robocalls could become the targets of hackers who could disrupt the PSTN by gaining control of the blocking systems. AARP urges that the FCC

promote the security of call-blocking systems, and to encourage service providers to use best practices to ensure that their systems are not vulnerable to attack.

Conclusion

AARP commends the Commission for its efforts to address the serious problem of illegal robocalls. AARP believes that substantial consumer benefits will arise with the successful resolution of the problem, and AARP encourages the Commission to act on the issues raised above. AARP looks forward to continued participation in the Commission's robocall-related proceedings as it pursues this important issue.